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SUBJECT: TURKEY: SOUTHEAST ELECTION RESULTS

REF: ANKARA 1875

1.(SBU) Summary: The Kurdish nationalist Democratic Society Party's (DTP) success in gaining 22 seats nation-wide demonstrates the continued salience of identity politics in southeastern Turkey. The ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), however, did unexpectedly well in the region by combining traditional powers of incumbency while simultaneously running against the Ankara military and bureaucratic establishment. The AKP's success also suggests that most southeast voters want to turn the page on the confrontational, violent politics that have dominated the region for 25 years. End summary.

#### Two-Party Race in Southeast

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2.(SBU) As expected, the election in the heavily Kurdish southeastern provinces of Turkey was a two-party contest between AKP and independent candidates endorsed by the Kurdish nationalist DTP. Twenty-two DTP-backed candidates won across the country, a respectable showing given the built-in barriers in the Turkish election system to independent candidates. In the Southeast, however, AKP put in a much stronger than expected performance, nearly equaling the DTP vote in Diyarbakir, the most important Kurdish province in the country. Main opposition Republican People's Party (CHP) was the big loser, surrendering all 14 of its seats in 12 heavily Kurdish southeast provinces. The stridently nationalist Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) was never in contention there.

#### AK: Party of Protest, Power and Faith

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3.(SBU) All of our contacts credit the Turkey General Staff (TGS) web-site memo of April 27, which was interpreted as an attack on both AKP and on democratic institutions, with generating huge sympathy for AKP among Kurdish voters, who reflexively support parties that are willing to challenge the power of Turkey's "deep state." Siyar Ozsoy, an aide to Diyarbakir's (DTP) mayor, told us that "People identify with those who face 'injustice' as most people think that they are experiencing different forms of injustice."

4.(SBU) While playing the victim in the final weeks of the campaign, throughout its four years in office AKP government used economic tools to win over voters; for example, the

government instituted a program of providing cash incentives to poor, rural families to keep their children in school, which resulted in significant supplements to many families, particularly those with many children. Payments are also made to elderly citizens and those with sons doing their military service. Some conservative voters also supported AKP for religious reasons, believing it can resolve the headscarf issue.

#### Competition on Kurdish Issue

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5.(SBU) According to Diyarbakir Bar Chairman Sezgin Tanrikoglu, many now believe that AKP is capable of addressing their core issues of expanding cultural and political rights. He noted that AKP vote more than tripled in Diyarbakir in the last five years thanks in part to the feeling that AKP is making sincere efforts at democratization. AK Party chairman (and now MP) in Diyarbakir, Abdurrahman Kurt, advocates many of the same policies favored by DTP, but carries none of the PKK baggage. Some AKP candidates spoke Kurdish regularly on the campaign trail, reinforcing the fact that their party is not part of the traditional Ankara establishment. The on-going violence between the PKK and the military also hurt the DTP vote, according to Tanrikoglu. In Diyarbakir, he said, many Kurds blame the PKK for the March, 2006 rioting and are losing confidence in DTP's efforts to achieve political reforms. AKP leadership also won sympathy in the final weeks of the campaign for refusing to sanction an incursion into Northern Iraq against the PKK despite intense pressure to do so from the media and elements of the military.

DTP: Projecting Moderation, Worried About Rowdy Constituents

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6.(SBU) DTP's campaign focused on Kurdish identity, and played up Kurds' absence from parliament for the last 14 years as the main issue. While this message resonated with about half the voters in the southeast, it did not travel well, even to regions that have seen massive Kurdish in-migration in the last ten years. In the view of Diyarbakir-based development worker Nurcan Baysal, DTP's inability to engage on economic issues hurt it, since poverty is the principal preoccupation for many Kurdish households in the region. AKP mayors in bordering regions such as Gaziantep, were able to capture the votes of many Kurdish migrants through a combination of generous assistance to the urban poor coupled with moderate, inclusive cultural policies. As a consequence, DTP was unable to capture any seats in the "near-east" migration destinations such as Adiyaman, Elazig and Mersin, though they have filed a petition protesting a close race in Adana.

7.(SBU) Free-lance journalist Yilmaz Akinci noted that DTP's success is already leading to high expectations among their supporters; a number of PKK sympathizers have used DTP victory rallies to chant pro-Ocalan slogans and they will likely be demanding rapid progress on their top priority issue of winning amnesty for PKK fighters. DTP's leadership, however, wants to project an image of moderation and has already promised to participate in parliamentary voting to elect a new president, a move that will be welcome news to AKP.

8.(SBU) Comment: AKP's unexpectedly strong win shows that "normal" politics detached from the vexed Kurdish issue is possible in the southeast. While AKP showed respect for Kurdish sensitivities, its success stemmed mainly from its ability to deliver services and provide economic assistance. PM Erdogan's July 24 declaration that AKP wants to win the mayoralty of Diyarbakir would have been laughable a week ago. Today it is probably an even-money bet.

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